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ABSTRACT

The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, an experimental college, has developed an innovative general education program. Teaching approaches and organizational structures of the program have been changed to accommodate the new curriculum. The general education core, called the Interdisciplinary Studies Sequence (IDS), includes courses in social foundations, language arts, mathematics, natural sciences, humanities, social studies, and physical education. Although this evolving program often changes to meet the current needs of students and society, its major purpose will always be to provide a humanistic education. (CJ)

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GENERAL EDUCATION:

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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A new consciousness has awakened in teacher education. The cry for relevance and the voiced need to give students broader exposure to courses outside their majors has resulted in changes in the general education requirements for teacher education undergraduates at many higher education institutions. These changes have had as their major goals the desire to provide a liberal education with improved social awareness and to provide a more humanistic education through the integration of subject matter. However, in most cases, universities have attempted to provide this "new general education" without changes in their organizational structure. This structure is generally that of a liberal arts college with a confederation of highly autonomous departments. These departments, in many cases, are quite loose organizations of professors, each of whom is following personal interests and goals with little concern for department and program goals. Therefore, the "new general education" movement has resulted in nothing more than a series of new courses with such humanistic titles as "Science for Poets," "Man and the Environment," and "Philosophy of Society," but, in reality, there has been little or no change in the teaching approach utilized or the content of these courses.

Clearly, if the "new general education" is to be provided, what is needed is a new organizational structure to the general education sequence -- a structure which emphasizes an interdisciplinary team approach to general education. The core of courses in general education at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma has been redesigned to provide the structure needed to utilize an interdisciplinary team approach so as to develop in students a new social awareness as well as a humanistic, enlightened view of the world of which students are an integral part.

The first section of this article is a general description of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma. The second section is a description of the Teacher Education Program general education core requirements.

The University

The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma is a small state supported liberal arts university in southcentral Oklahoma. The University has been charged by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to function as an experimental university which attempts to identify fresh approaches to problems in higher education. The experimental nature of the institution has produced a faculty with maximum flexibility to experiment. Moreover, the experimental nature of the University has resulted in the evolution of considerable emphasis on cooperative faculty innovations and cooperative instructional approaches to higher education.

The University is a limited enrollment, moderately selective institution which draws the majority of its students from central and western Oklahoma. In addition, the University draws students from a cross-section of the state, as well as from all parts of the United Stated and several foreign countries.

To make acceleration possible in a student's program, the University operates on a unique and distinctive year-round system known as the trimester. Each trimester consists of a fifteen-week period which is equivalent to the traditional semester of other colleges and universities.

The third trimester at the University makes the trimester system truly unique. It is composed of a five-week term and a ten-week term. The five-week term has been named the Independent Study Term. It has been designed to provide special opportunities for the scholarly development of those who participate. It is intended to free students from the mechanics of the usual classroom situation and to provide for self-direction in learning. In pursuit of this aim, both individual and group projects are available. Proposals for

both types can originate with either faculty members or students. In both types of projects, the student assumes the responsibility of directing, motivating, sustaining, and organizing his own study or research in accordance with his own individuality. The faculty member's role in the Independent Study is to provide the student with a sounding board for his ideas and with resources not otherwise available.

The General Education Sequence

The core of courses in general education at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma is required of every degree candidate. This core has been designed to give every student an interdisciplinary liberal education. This Interdisciplinary Studies Sequence (IDS) seeks to break down traditional lines of thought into more meaningful patterns. It seeks to expose the student to the best that has been thought and said and created in the world, to expose him to the values, ideas, and philosophy of the ages. It seeks to enrich his mind, ennoble his nature, and free his spirit. To accomplish these goals, the interdisciplinary sequence is staffed with faculty members from such diverse areas as Arts and Humanities, Education, English, Mathematics, Natural Science, and Social Sciences who work cooperatively to provide a truly liberal education.

The Interdisciplinary Studies Sequence (IDS) consists of 46 semester hours. These 46 semester hours include six semester hours in the area of Social Foundations, eight semester hours in the Language Arts, four semester hours in Mathematics, six semester hours in the Natural Sciences, twelve semester hours in the Humanities, six semester hours in Social Studies, and four semester hours in Physical Education.

Contemporary Man in World Society, the six-semester-hour Social Foundations interdisciplinary sequence, includes studies of such major issues as: the international clashes of ideologies; the major political, social, and economic issues among world societies; the state of religious thought in America in

its relationship to religious thought in other cultures. Attention is also given to problems primarily American in their content; the individual and his identity in a mass-culture; the status of the family in American society; and the role of the citizen in relation to his local, state and national governments.

Composition and Speech and Composition and Literature, the eight-semester-hour Language Arts interdisciplinary sequence, consists of the study of the rhetorical principles common to written and oral composition. Exposition and argumentation are emphasized. The sequence is organized about these processes: (1) purpose in discourse; (2) organization of ideas; (3) support of ideas; (4) reasoning; (5) use of language; and (6) adaptation of the discourse to the communicative situation. Written composition and extensive practice in the organization and delivery of speeches are also features of this sequence. Moreover, the sequence makes a study of literary forms and the writing of analytical papers about literature. The primary purpose of the literature section is to teach students to read the short story, the novel, poetry, and plays and to write critical papers on their readings.

Mathematics and Modern Man, the four-semester-hour Mathematics interdisciplinary course, makes a study of the history and philosophy of mathematics, introductory logic, computer concepts, and algebraic systems. Emphasis is on the structure, language, and thought processes of mathematics.

Foundations of Science, the six-semester-hour Natural Science interdisciplinary sequence, cuts across the fields of philosophic substructures of science, the structure of matter and energy, cosmology, and biology. This sequence represents a part of the student's broad education in the liberal arts and is taught in an experimental manner by means of lectures, readings, films, demonstrations, and other media. An attempt is made to aid the student's understanding of modern society through comprehension of science as a technique utilized by man in the mastery of nature. Emphasis is placed

upon the profound effect which science and technology have had upon our lives, culture, thinking, and chances for survival.

The Principal Ideas of Greece and Rome, The Principal Ideas of Oriental Civilization, The Principal Ideas of Medieval and Renaissance Man, and The Principal Ideas of the Modern World, the twelve-semester-hour Humanities interdisciplinary sequence, has been designed to introduce students to the chief accomplishments of Europe and the Orient by focusing on their history, literature, philosophy, and arts. A special effort is made to show how problems of the past affect the present and provide insight on dealing with further problems within our society. The history of each era and civilization serve as the frame work of the sequence, but the primary emphasis is on how the people of these nations lived when their civilizations were at their zeniths. Lectures, reading, films, and other media are used to lead the students to an understanding of the ways of life, the governments, and the interpretations of the universe developed by these races and nations.

The American Experience in History and Government, the six-semester-hour Social Studies interdisciplinary sequence, has been designed to explore certain issues in American life that are likely to affect students significantly in the next decades; to place these issues in a historical context; to examine the government principles and values inherent in them; and thus to examine critically those parts of the American experience which are relevant to contemporary society. The sequence is considered a "capstone" to the student's undergraduate studies at the University. The format utilized in the sequence is that of a modified structure seminar.

The four semester hours of Physical Education activities required of all students has been designed to provide students with a knowledge of recreational pursuits suitable for participation throughout life. Students fulfill the requirements by selecting from a wide variety of team sports, individual and

dual sports, aquatic, and dance. The one-semester-hour course Concepts of Health and Fitness must be included in the four semester hours completed by students in physical education.

In addition to the required planned interdisciplinary sequence in general education, an independent study in interdisciplinary studies under the supervision of a faculty member is also available to students as an elective. The elective independent study may be repeated, for a total of nine hours to apply toward a degree, with a change each enrollment in title and content.

In order to facilitate the interdisciplinary approach to general education, team teaching is utilized in most of the core sequence. For example, the Social Foundations sequence, Contemporary Man in World Society, is often taught by a team consisting of a historian, a psychologist, and a sociologist. Moreover, specialists in other disciplines are invited in as guest lecturers.

Although the Interdisciplinary Studies Sequence (IDS) makes up the core of courses in general education, students in teacher education must also complete at least four semester hours of general education electives to meet certification requirements. Elementary Education majors must include a geography course among these elective hours.

Summary

The Interdisciplinary Studies Sequence (IDS) at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma is not a finished product. As with any innovative, evolving program, change to meet the changing needs of students and society should be an integral part of the program design. At the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, the faculty is committed to maintaining relevance; therefore, the general education sequence will continue to change to maintain its relevance; to inspire students to throw off their armor and learn; to teach students to be real persons, to become aware, to live with integrity, to be human, and above all to be humanistic. Yes, to be truly free!